

## Views from Almaden and Evergreen

Posted by Pierluigi Oliverio on Monday, May 04, 2009

Over a month ago I wrote about a budget meeting I led in District 6 with **my own presentation on the deficit** and alternative solutions. Since then, other council offices have scheduled their meetings. I was curious to hear the opinions from outside my district. So last week I attended the budget meetings in District 10, Almaden/Blossom Valley, and District 8, Evergreen. Both meetings were led by the city manager's office with its own presentation.

The District 10 meeting was held in Blossom Valley, not Almaden as last year's had been. About 35-40 people attended, including a few union business agents and other union members. I sat next to a gentleman who was very coy. I asked him how he heard about the meeting and he would not say. I then asked how long he lived in the neighborhood and he said, "Santa Cruz...er...I mean San Jose." I enjoy meeting new people and like to know where people are from, but...I was surprised to hear "Santa Cruz" for a meeting that was for the residents of a specific council district. So now I am curious and I ask the man, "What do you do for work?" He then said "ugh...I would rather not say." I then asked, "Is it that big of a deal?" He said "Yes. I do no want to say." Strange gentleman who never spoke during the meeting.

After the presentation, residents wrote questions on cards and they were read out loud. People became annoyed with the card reading and started asking questions directly. Every resident was consistent on their message. They were fed up with what they deemed excessive pensions, sick pay and other compensation items. One man with a beard and glasses spoke, then a woman who lived in San Jose for 50 years, then a semiconductor engineer and then a woman in her 40s. They all said they wanted changes to be made asap, and they themselves did not know if they would even have a job in the private sector from week to week. None of the union reps spoke at the meeting. It was odd that if a resident made a negative statement about unions that were out of line with their comments they had to cease speaking. Most of the time was spent on the presentation and only 10-15 minutes on questions.

The District 8 meeting was held on the East Side, off Tully and King, and not in Evergreen. There were about 20 people at the meeting. The city management did the presentation; however, Councilmember Herrera mixed it up and had the attendees play the same budget game that was done at City Hall back in January for the Neighborhood Associations. The group broke out with a list of service cuts and a list of revenue enhancements and the groups presented back to everyone. Nearly all five groups chose to raise taxes, such as a sales tax increase, also sell vacant city land, raise parking fines and put a fee on plastic/paper bags.

Some also had some interesting ideas to raise revenue, like raising the cost to go to the bathroom Downtown at those automatic toilets. Another was to ban smoking in all of San Jose and then fine people for smoking. Another was that all residents must volunteer one hour of their expertise. The example given was a doctor would give a free hour for a physical, and that would save the city money. No one had the heart to tell this person that there was no correlation to save the city money since the city does not run hospitals.

I was pretty shocked at the consensus on the service cuts that came from the groups, ideas like closing a fire station, not hiring police, reducing street paving and eliminating crossing guards. Other service cuts matched the city-wide telephone survey: reduce the rate of personnel costs, reduce funding to non profits, reduce library hours and reduce park maintenance. They also wanted to cut long-range planning for land use. (???) Evergreen seems to be a textbook example of not enough long-term planning, as it is mostly housing and few jobs which creates a painful commute for many residents.

In my opinion, you really you can't blame any of the residents for their choices. The management made up the cards with things that they want to see cut which does not necessarily equate to what the council will decide. And, after all, it's the elected officials who decide what the budget looks like, not management.

If you would like to view my budget presentation please visit <a href="mailto:my">my</a> <a href="mailto:www.sanjoseca.gov/District6/budget.asp">website at http://www.sanjoseca.gov/District6/budget.asp</a>

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